



## The Batalan Project: Unfolding the Historical Significance of Battles in Moron During the Japanese Invasion, 1941-1945

**Juan Kristopier D. Angeles**

Bataan Peninsula State University, Main  
Campus, Graduate Studies, Philippines  
[jukristopier@gmail.com](mailto:jukristopier@gmail.com)

**Guillermo Q. Roman**

Bataan Peninsula State University, Main  
Campus, Graduate Studies, Philippines

**Maria April P. Katigbak**

No Borders International School, Japan

*Received:10/04/2025 Accepted:11/04/2025 Published:12/30/2025*

### Abstract

This study examines the historical significance of the Battles in Moron (now Morong), Bataan, during World War II, focusing on the Japanese invasion of 1941–1942 and the pre-liberation period of 1944–1945. Although the Battle of Moron is recognized as the site of the last mounted cavalry charge in U.S. military history, it remains underrepresented in national and local historical narratives. Guided by collective memory theory, historical narratology, and culturally responsive pedagogy, the research employed semi-structured interviews with a surviving veteran, descendants of guerrilla fighters, community elders, and local historians, as well as documentary analysis of military records and archival reports. Findings revealed that the Battles of Moron were strategically crucial in delaying Japanese advances and symbolically significant in shaping community resilience. Oral testimonies illuminated the experiences of displacement, survival, and civilian–guerrilla collaboration, while archival evidence contextualized these accounts within the broader defense of Bataan. The study highlights the need to revitalize Morong’s wartime legacy through localized curricular materials that foster critical historical awareness, cultural identity, and pride among future generations.

*Keywords: Battles of Moron, World War II, Collective Memory, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Local History, Morong, Bataan*

## Introduction

Historically, the Second World War has been the most studied historical event in the academy worldwide. However, the inhibiting emotions and interpretations in this field have been varied. From the perspectives of historians, the memories from the Japanese occupation of the Philippines are not only narratives of military strategies, defeat, losses, resilience, and, in the end, victory, but also an irrevocable trauma. Premiered WW2 historian Ricardo Jose noted that by examining these narratives, one can see society's struggle to process historical memory as it establishes its national identity (Jose, 2012). Similarly, Nakano (1999) noted that Japanese scholars regarded the study of WW2 as a painful reminder of defeat and shame, vis-à-vis the immense suffering and oppression on the Filipinos' end during this period (Matthiessen, 2016). These conflicting views and the obvious struggle to scaffold its national identity because of the stigma attached by WW2 highlight the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to research that transcends national boundaries and reconstructs the legacy of war through consideration of local histories

In Philippine historiography, there has been significant attention to World War II, but considerable research gaps remain. While scholars have outlined the contours of war in comprehensive studies of the fall of Bataan, the infamous Death March, and the celebrated liberation campaigns, the significant local battles have been marginalized. Among these underrecognized historical events is the Battle of Moron (now Morong), which occurred between January 14 and 19, 1942. This battle was brief, delaying the Japanese advance toward Bataan. This historical event has also been the site of the last cavalry charge in Philippine and American history (Rottman, 2011). Despite its significance, it has been mostly omitted in national accounts and history books, creating a void between the local experiences of war and the mainstream historical narrative. Such historical events have been forgotten even by the local community, or, worse, they have never been known. This research gap underscores the importance of examining localized histories through primary and secondary sources to reconstruct the broader wartime narrative of the Japanese invasion.

Reexamining the significance of these local battles requires situating Morong within the broader historical context. The local identity of the people of Morong, formerly known as Moron during the Japanese Invasion, has been shaped by colonial impositions, wartime history, and national humanitarian efforts. While there have been scarce resources that directly narrate historical events of this town, the early town's name can be traced from archival maps such as the *Mapa de la Bahía de Manila y Ensenada de Subic* (1715) that recorded the settlement as "Maraiumo," termed from "maraming susong umang", which translates as "plenty of hermit crabs" (Archivo General de Indias, 1715). Accordingly, during the peak of Spanish colonization in the Philippines in the 18th century, the settlement again appeared on Jesuit Pedro Murillo Velarde's map (1734) as "Morong". Also, during the Spanish period, the name Morong was converted to "Moron". This change has been attributed to the absence of the phoneme in Spanish, leading native Spanish speakers to substitute the standard "n" sound. Another version traced this conversion to the confusion brought by toponymic repetition with another settlement in southern Luzon (Morong, Rizal) during the Spanish era.

However, during the American colonial period, the term Moron, was a designation that carried a derogatory connotation. Thus, after the liberation, Bataan Representative Jose R. Nuguid enacted Republic Act No. 1249, which restored the original name, Morong, on June 10, 1955. This renaming highlights the community's desire to reclaim its authentic identity and resist pejorative colonial legacies. Against this historical backdrop, there have been momentous events detached from the town's very name in national historical narratives. One of which is the Battle of Moron in January 1942, which becomes more than an underrepresented military engagement but a critical stronghold during wartime, interweaving local history, cultural memory, and the national struggle for freedom.

This research aims to address the precipitating issue of national historical narratives that sideline local perspectives. There are two ways this research will seek to provide a solution: by exploring local perspectives and by reconstructing consolidated narratives from primary and secondary sources. Through archival research and oral history, the researchers aimed to rebuild the narrative of the Battle of Moron. By documenting the unpublished acts of gallantry of local guerrillas and their contributions to local communities, the study seeks to restore community awareness and engagement to the broader World War II memory. Furthermore, the findings of the current research will be incorporated into instructional materials to enhance local history education among senior high school students. Having a contextualized understanding of the war will foster a collective identity among learners, potentially deepening their appreciation and curiosity about local history, cultural heritage, and their role in the struggle for freedom. In this way, the research addresses the call for collaborative and inclusive studies that foster deeper awareness across generations, as articulated by historian Ricardo T. Jose.

In addition, the current research is further supported by the legal and institutionalized frameworks of the Department of Education (DepEd) and the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP). On the one hand, DepEd has long emphasized integrating local history into the curriculum to enhance a sense of identity. Moreover, with the newly strengthened Senior High School curriculum, the priority of teaching local history has been emphasized and considered. On the other hand, NHCP encourages initiatives to preserve community-based narratives as part of the national historical narratives. Furthermore, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) highlights the importance of preserving oral histories and local traditions to promote cultural continuity. These institutionalized bases reinforce the urgency and legitimacy of the researchers' aim to reconstruct the overlooked accounts of Morong's wartime experience.

On a personal note, the researchers' motivation to pursue this topic is rooted in a deep connection to Bataan's history and identity. Growing up in a province globally recognized for its wartime legacy, the researchers believe that unfolding the Battle of Moron is not just a way to preserve local historical narratives but also to honor the sacrifices of local heroes whose stories remain silent in mainstream accounts. This conviction is strengthened by the aspiration to contribute meaningfully to the Bataan Peninsula State University graduate program by producing a localized study that not only fills a historical gap but also provides tangible learning resources for the schools and communities. Ultimately, this research is a response to

both academic responsibility and personal commitment to preserving Bataan's historical memory.

The current research critically assessed the historical significance of the Battles in Moron, which took place during the early Japanese invasion (1941–1942) and the local initiatives during the pre-liberation period of the Moron guerrillas (1944–1945) in the defense of Bataan during World War II. Despite recognition of the Battle of Moron as the last mounted cavalry charge in U.S. military history, the event has received limited scholarly and public attention in both national and local historical accounts. Hence, the researcher reconstructed the narratives of these battles and analyzed their relevance to the broader contexts of Philippine and local history through the integration of archival research and oral history.

Specifically, the researcher aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What were the key battles that took place in Moron during the Japanese invasion?
2. What was the lasting historical significance of the Battles of Moron?
3. How were the events and memories of these battles preserved and commemorated by the residents and local authorities?
4. How could the narrative of the Battles in Moron be crafted as local historical content for educational purposes?

By addressing these research questions, the study contributed to historical knowledge of the Battles in Moron and as well as to the development of learning resources that emphasized local history, cultural heritage, and local participation in the struggle for freedom for the usage among schools and communities across Bataan and beyond.

The current study has benefited various stakeholders and significantly influenced historical scholarship and policymaking. The findings of the current study were valuable, particularly to the following groups:

- *Senior High School Students and Educators.* The primary beneficiaries of the current research were senior high school students and educators in Bataan. As outputs of the current study, these beneficiaries gained access to localized historical content that connects their community to national historical narratives. The instructional materials, informed by the findings, were essential because contextualized lessons made history more engaging and meaningful and aligned with the Department of Education's new goals for the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum.
- *Local Communities of Morong and Bataan.* The people of Morong and the broader province of Bataan benefited from the preservation of their cultural heritage through this research. By documenting the Battles in Moron, the community developed greater pride in their ancestors' heroism and sacrifices. Moreover, this research strengthened local identity, resilience, and intergenerational remembrance, thereby fostering a collective sense of community.
- *Local Historians and Historical Scholars.* The study also provided local historians and scholars with new archival data and oral accounts that contribute to the body of knowledge about Philippine World War II historiography. The researchers also gained

access to previously overlooked local engagements such as the Battle of Moron, preserving a more accurate historical record and creating new avenues for further research.

- *Government Officials and Policymakers.* Local government leaders and policymakers also benefited from insights that could guide cultural preservation, heritage tourism, and education policies among local communities. The findings can be applied to community development initiatives, highlighting how recognition of historical sites like Morong could promote both sustainable heritage conservation and local economic opportunities.
- *National Historiography and World War II Scholars.* Finally, national historians and World War II scholars benefited from a more complete picture of the Philippines' wartime experience provided by this research. By integrating localized battles into broader narratives, historians and scholars constructed a more comprehensive history that recognized both major campaigns and smaller, decisive engagements that contributed to the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese invaders.

In summary, this study served a wide array of stakeholders by providing historical insights, strengthening cultural preservation, enriching education, and informing policy, while fostering a deeper understanding of local and national history during one of the most pivotal periods in world history.

Essentially, the research focused on two significant aspects of the wartime experiences in Morong, Bataan. First, the researcher examined the January 14–19, 1942, battle, remembered as the site of the last mounted cavalry charge undertaken by Filipino and American forces of the 26th Cavalry (Philippine Scouts). This event, often highlighted in military accounts of the Fall of Bataan, demonstrated the desperate but courageous efforts of Allied forces to delay the Japanese advance (Agoncillo, 1990; Morton, 1953). While underrepresented, local perspectives also highlight the involvement of local communities, as residents of Moron witnessed the destruction and disruption caused by the onset of war.

Second, the study emphasized the sustained resistance of Moron guerrillas (3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Bataan Military District) from 1942 to 1945, which exemplified the resilience of ordinary civilians who transitioned into irregular fighters during the Japanese occupation. Guerrilla warfare in Bataan has been acknowledged as an integral part of the broader resistance movement in the Philippines. However, local experiences, such as those in Morong, remain underrepresented in mainstream historical narratives (Zaide & Zaide, 1999). Oral histories gathered from elders and living local guerrillas in Morong provided valuable testimonies, adding depth to archival sources and revealing how local identity and collective memory preserved these wartime struggles.

Furthermore, the current research was delimited to battles and resistance activities within Morong and its immediate environs, particularly the Batalan River and neighboring barangays, which served as focal points of conflict and refuge. However, the researcher did not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of the entire Bataan campaign or of the province-wide guerrilla resistance movement, as these have been the subject of broader historical works. Instead, the researcher of the current study focused on reconstructing

Morong's underrepresented wartime narratives as part of its contribution to local and national memory.

By combining archival records with oral testimonies, the researcher of the current study sought to balance national military history with community-based perspectives. This ensured that the reconstruction of Morong's wartime experience was grounded in documented sources and enriched by the lived experiences of its people.

## **Methods**

The current study focused on reconstructing historical narratives using a qualitative research design. The researchers used archival research and face-to-face interviews as the primary data-gathering methods. The qualitative approach is well-suited to exploring the depth and complexity of historical events, particularly those embedded in local contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By highlighting historical reconstruction through experiential insights and analyses of published primary and secondary sources, this method aligns with the study's goal of uncovering nuanced perspectives and previously overlooked accounts of local history during the Japanese invasion of the Philippines.

Archival research is a foundational technique used in this study, involving the collection and analysis of historical documents, photographs, and guerrilla reports from various sources, including local libraries, government archives, and online repositories. These sources have served as the factual basis for the study, allowing a detailed exploration of the historical events and their significance. Complementing this method is the use of oral history from first-hand accounts, capturing the lived experiences and memories of community elders, living guerrilla hero and his descendants, as well as local historians. This method bridges the gap between documented historical records and personal narratives, highlighting the multiple perspectives during World War II in the Philippines.

The population of this study comprised individuals closely associated with the historical and cultural narratives of the battles in Morong, Bataan, during World War II. This included the only living guerrilla fighter in Morong, Bataan, descendants of guerrilla fighters, and local historians and history enthusiasts. Such a focused population enabled a comprehensive understanding of the historical event from multiple perspectives, encompassing both primary and secondary sources. With this, the study employed purposive sampling to select participants with significant knowledge, lived experiences, or connections to the Japanese invasion of Morong, Bataan, and the accompanying battles within the town. The firsthand account of the only surviving Moron Regiment guerrilla has served as the foundation for the data collected in this study. Consequently, the voices of community elders and descendants of guerrilla fighters were included for their direct or inherited memories of historical events, providing invaluable contributions to personal and collective narratives. Finally, local historians and WWII history enthusiasts were also included to help situate the narrated battles into historical as well as cultural context. The sampling method used in this research is based on the principle of data saturation, which involves continuous data collection until sufficient information is obtained to achieve the research goal without

redundancy. This sampling approach prioritized depth and richness of information over quantity.

The research instruments for this study are designed to collect both qualitative data and historical documentation essential for reconstructing the narratives of the battles in Morong, Bataan, during World War II. There are two primary instruments employed: (1) a semi-structured interview guide for the face-to-face interviews and (2) a document analysis checklist for the archival data. These instruments are integral to ensuring that the study captures diverse perspectives through oral testimonies and archival materials, both of which are crucial in uncovering the historical and cultural significance of the battles in Morong, Bataan, during World War II.

Initially, the semi-structured interview guide serves as the primary tool for collecting oral histories. It contains open-ended questions intended to elicit rich, detailed accounts from key informants, including living veterans, veterans' families, local historians, community elders, and other Morong residents knowledgeable about the battles. The interview guide is carefully designed to allow participants to share their stories in their own words, while also providing the researcher flexibility to follow emerging leads or probe deeper into significant details. In conducting a narrative inquiry, establishing a point of view on certain parts of the story requires creativity on the researcher's part. This involves carefully listening to the narrators, identifying turning points in their accounts, and creatively redirecting or reframing conversations to keep the data focused and relevant to the research questions. This approach strengthens the reconstruction of events while preserving the authenticity of the participants' voices. In addition, the document analysis checklist complements the oral narratives by systematically examining primary and secondary historical sources, such as military reports, guerrilla documents, local government archives, published books, and newspaper accounts that reference Morong during World War II. The document analysis checklist is structured to assess the authenticity, context, and relevance of each document, and to identify gaps or biases in representation. Cross-referencing archival records with oral testimonies provides triangulation, ensuring that the reconstructed history balances factual accuracy with participants' lived experiences. These instruments provide the methodological foundation of the study. The semi-structured interviews capture the subjective, emotional, and memory-driven aspects of the battles, while the document analysis provides contextual grounding and corroborates published historical accounts.

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout this study, particularly given the sensitive nature of the research, which involves collecting personal testimonies, using historical records, and involving individuals who may have strong emotional connections to the events discussed. First, informed consent is obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants are informed of the study's purpose, the type of data to be collected, how the data will be used, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. This ensures that participants are fully informed and their autonomy is respected. Confidentiality and privacy are also key ethical considerations. While the study involves sharing personal stories, participants' identities are protected. Pseudonyms are used in reporting the interviews, and care is taken to avoid disclosing sensitive or identifiable

information unless participants have explicitly consented to its inclusion. Participants may also review their interview transcripts to verify the accuracy of the recorded information and approve the final representation of their contributions.

In addition, the study acknowledges the potential risks of retraumatization for some participants, particularly those with direct or familial ties to the battle. Sensitivity is maintained throughout the interview process, with a focus on creating a supportive environment in which participants can share their experiences without pressure. The researcher also ensures compliance with ethical guidelines for the treatment of historical documents, thereby preserving the authenticity and integrity of archival materials. Lastly, the study adheres to institutional ethical standards and guidelines for research involving human subjects. Ethical approval is sought from the relevant institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee to ensure that all research practices comply with recognized ethical principles, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Narratives were examined both for their factual content and for the insights they offer into collective memory and local identity. Actual responses in Tagalog were transcribed and translated into English, thereby preserving linguistic authenticity and cultural context. Alongside oral narratives, archival sources were critically analyzed. These included newspaper articles from the Honolulu Star-Bulletin (Hewlett, 1942a; Hewlett, 1942b), official military documents such as *The Wainwright's Paper* (Ancheta, 1980), operational reports of the USAFFE and USFIP (Morton, 1953), records from the PVAO website, biographies of WWII Veterans (Ramsey & Rivale, 1990), as well as legal documents (sworn statements of Mallari and Euperio). The researchers assessed these sources for bias, context, and historical accuracy, cross-referencing them with interview data to triangulate findings. Particular attention was given to underrepresented aspects of the battles in Morong, Bataan, including the first naval engagement at Mayagao Point by Burkeley and his PT boat team, the Japanese roadblock at KM 167, and the Moron Guerrilla ambush in Ibayo, Sabang, Morong, Bataan. These events, often overlooked in historical accounts, were analyzed alongside the oral narratives to ensure that local contributions and experiences were fully represented and validated.

The final stage of analysis involved synthesizing the oral and archival narratives into a cohesive historical account. This reconstruction traces day-by-day events, combat sequences, and the interplay among American, Filipino, and local guerrilla forces. By contextualizing these narratives within the larger military and social history of Bataan, the study highlights the military, cultural, and social significance of the battles in Morong, Bataan. The resulting account not only documents historical events but also reflects the community's collective memory, ensuring that local heroes and their contributions are preserved for educational purposes and future generations. This approach extends beyond thematic coding, prioritizing narrative flow and experiential detail. This allows the voices of those who lived through the battles to guide the historical reconstruction. Triangulation with archival sources ensures both reliability and depth.



## Results

### *Moron and Its Folded Pages in History*

Cornelio Bascara's *A History of Bataan (1587–1900): Scanning Its Geographic, Social, Political, and Economic Terrain* (2010) comprehensively illustrates the province's colonial status and the gradual development of Morong in its quest for township status. Bascara (2010) noted that Bataan was historically referred to as *rinconadas*, which literally means "seated or located in the corner" (p. 3). The colonizers assigned this name because of the province's geographic location, jutting out of Luzon in the southwest corner, or *rincon*.

In the southern part of the peninsula, edging the West Philippine Sea, Subic and Olongapo lie adjacent to Morong. Furthermore, Bascara (2010) cited accounts from 1851 by early Spanish authors Manuel Buzeta and Felipe Bravo in their *Diccionario Geográfico-Estadístico-Histórico de las Islas Filipinas*, which specifically identified the location of Morong as "at the right side of a river about 125°58' longitude, 14°42' latitude," with Bagac further descending, noted then as a former visita of Morong (p. 4).



Figure 2. Mapa de la Bahía de Manila y Ensenada de Subic (Archivo General de Indias, 1715)

Archival materials corroborate that the settlement predates Spanish standardization of historical accounts. The *Mapa de la Bahía de Manila y Ensenada de Subic* (1715) identifies the site as *Maraiumo* or *Mariuma*, a term linked in oral tradition to the *suso na umang ang tawag* (a shell inhabited by a hermit crab), suggesting that pre-colonial lifeways and local ecology informed place-naming practices, as Morong is a coastal area. Bascara (2010) also cited various

early sitios in Morong in his discussion of the waterways in Bataan. One of these was the Minanga waterway, originating from Mt. Llacnis, and the other from Sitio Tibana, whose source was Mt. Damalang.

Another river in Morong was described as 30 varas wide (1 vara = 0.8 meters) and one to two feet deep, formed by the confluence of four streams: one from Mt. Cairocan and three from Mt. Natib, all of which were not navigable (Bascara, 2010, p. 11). By contrast, the deepest river in Morong was that of Sitio Manabo, measuring 300 brazas in width (1 braza = 1.7 meters) and about five to six feet deep. This river was utilized by loggers and polistas (local laborers), reflecting its role in early resource extraction and colonial labor systems (Bascara, 2010, p. 11). The precise locations of these sitios and mountains remain an open question. It represents a significant gap in local historiography, one which the present researcher considers worth pursuing in future studies.

### *Beyond the Phrase “Mga Moro Umuurong”*

The standard explanation for the origin of the name of the town of Morong, Bataan, rests on the phrase “Mga Moro Umuurong” (retreating Moros). This is the version etched into the collective memory of present-day residents whenever they are asked about the etymology of their town’s name. Based on available records, this explanation can be traced back to the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16th century. In 1578, Morong became part of the Corregimiento de Mariveles, which also included Corregidor and Maragondon, Cavite, while the rest of Bataan fell under the jurisdiction of Pampanga.

However, beyond this widely accepted version, archival accounts and oral traditions reveal alternative narratives about the town’s name that risk being forgotten by future generations. One such version attributes “Morong” to the shouted words of two foreign pirates captured by the town’s early settlers. Prior to the Spanish presence in 1587 (with the parish of Our Lady of the Pillar formally established in 1607 alongside its coral-stone church), Morong already had a thriving settlement that engaged in trade with foreign merchants who arrived by sea. While this commerce brought prosperity, it also exposed the community to pirate and marauder raids. Nevertheless, through unity, the people successfully repelled these attacks. During one such clash, the locals captured two foreign pirates. When asked who they were, the captives, unable to communicate due to the language barrier, responded with only two words: one shouted “Moron,” while the other countered with “Ong.” Separated into different holding places, the two continued shouting these words back and forth until the sounds “Moron” and “Ong” became ingrained in the memory of the settlement. Over time, locals began to combine the two as a nickname, eventually forming the word “Morong.”

Thus, when the Spaniards later inquired about the place’s name in the sixteenth century, the residents, perhaps recalling the incident of the captured pirates, gave the name “Morong.” Spanish colonial records and Jesuit cartographer Pedro Murillo Velarde’s map of 1734 (Figure 3) both confirm that the town was already known as Morong by that time. However, confusion later arose, since there was another Morong in Rizal province. By the mid-nineteenth century, evidence shows that the town’s name had already shifted: Bishop Francisco Gainza’s *Ensayo Físico, Descriptivo, Estadístico y Religioso de la Provincia de*

Bataan (1848), along with its accompanying map (Figure 4), identified the settlement as “Moron,” reflecting how colonial orthography and administrative adjustments influenced local nomenclature.

This altered name carried into the American occupation and, unfortunately, persisted into the post-liberation era, where it acquired the negative English connotation of “stupid” or “foolish.” To remove this stigma and restore the town’s historical name, Congressman Jose R. Nuguid authored Republic Act No. 1249, which was passed on June 10, 1955, officially changing Moron to Morong.



Figure 3-4. Murillo-Velarde Map: A Hydrographical and Chorographical Chart of the Philippine Islands (left); *Ensayo Físico, Descriptivo Estadístico y Religioso de la Provincia de Bataan* (right) (Gainza, 1848).

In summary, the archival trail shows that the town’s name underwent a cyclical evolution: from Morong in the sixteenth century, when it first appeared in Spanish records, to Moron during the American period, and finally back to Morong in 1955 through Republic Act No. 1249 (Nuguid, 1955). This trajectory underscores how local history, oral tradition, and colonial misunderstandings intersect to shape a community’s identity. The folded pages of its history, from Maraiumo in the 1715 *Mapa de la Bahía de Manila y Ensenada de Subic* (Archivo General de Indias, 1715), to Morong, to Moron, and ultimately back again to Morong, illustrate how local identity has been repeatedly contested, reshaped, and reasserted across centuries.

For the people of Morong, these name changes represented far more than administrative adjustments. They embodied struggles over cultural memory, dignity, and belonging. During World War II, the town’s identity became even more deeply bound to narratives of resistance and sacrifice when Morong served as a battleground during the Japanese invasion. In this layered context, the history of the town’s name reflects both the fragility and resilience of local identity. It demonstrates how communities navigate the legacies of conquest, ridicule, and war, while continuously seeking to affirm their place in the national memory.

To understand Morong's wartime experiences and its eventual role in World War II, it is essential to examine the town's earlier encounters with colonial powers and local struggles for self-determination. Long before Japanese troops arrived on its shores, Morong had already cultivated a tradition of leadership, loyalty, and organized defense, forged in the fires of revolution and resistance. These formative episodes offer not only historical background but also insight into how the community built the political will and collective memory that would later sustain it in moments of national crisis.

### *Situation Before the Battle of Moron*

Within the broader national and military context, Morong's local leadership played its own role in bridging historical struggles for sovereignty and the looming wartime challenge. During the 1898 revolutionary period, as President Emilio Aguinaldo established his Dictatorial Government against Spain, Morong responded with loyalty and order under its respected leader, General Salvador "Kabesang Aron" Linao, the elected *president of the local* government who maintained peace throughout the town (Guerrero, 2010). Similarly, during the Philippine-American War, General Gregorio Gonzales, another son of Morong, was appointed by General Pantaleon Garcia as the guerrilla leader of the town, underscoring Morong's tradition of local resistance and organized defense (Bascara, 2010).

Amidst the Philippine-American War, Morong also became a refuge for revolutionary forces seeking to regroup and rebuild. One notable figure was General Saturnino P. Javillo of the Republican Army from Sigma, Capiz, who settled in the town with his wife, Simeona Ongtenco, along with several allied families. Their presence highlighted Morong's role as a sanctuary for revolutionary leadership and loyal supporters at a pivotal moment in the struggle for Philippine independence (Bonifacio, 2024). This legacy reinforced the town's historical significance as more than just a battleground; it was a community that offered shelter, continuity, and a base for collective resistance. Accordingly, President Manuel L. Quezon (then only a lieutenant) was said to have sought refuge in the jungles of Bagac and Morong. One account noted in the Cultural Mapping of 1953: Lt. Quezon visited Vicencio Calimbas in Ibayo Morong, Bataan, to treat the skin itchiness he experienced.

Before the imminent Japanese invasion and the eventual Battle of Moron, the relationship between Filipino forces and American authorities had already undergone a crucial transition. Under the Commonwealth government, President Manuel L. Quezon prioritized national defense as part of preparing the country for full sovereignty. The National Defense Act of 1935 (Commonwealth Act No. 1) laid the foundation for the Philippine Army, envisioned as a force comprising regulars, reserves, and integrated constabulary units to secure the archipelago against external threats (Trotta-Jose, 1992). This vision was institutionalized through the Office of the Military Advisor to the Commonwealth Government (OMACG), created in 1935 with General Douglas MacArthur as chief advisor. Through OMACG, the United States collaborated with Philippine leadership to draft defense plans, organize training, and procure arms. Despite these efforts, chronic limitations persisted: lack of funds, shortages of trained officers, and political debates over prioritizing defense or civilian needs (Trotta-Jose, 1992).



By mid-1941, as Japanese expansion in the Pacific grew more threatening, the defense framework shifted dramatically. On July 26, 1941, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt federalized the Philippine Army, integrating it into the United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). This placed Filipino soldiers under American command, with General Douglas MacArthur in charge. While this structure promised unity, it also underscored tensions: Filipinos were determined to defend their homeland, yet their resources and strategies remained subject to American priorities (AFP, n.d.; Trota-Jose, 1992).

The outbreak of war in the Pacific came with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, followed within hours by devastating air raids on Clark Air Base and other Philippine military installations (Morton, 1953). These strikes crippled much of the archipelago's air power and signaled the beginning of Japan's invasion. The 14th Army, under General Masaharu Homma, advanced swiftly across Luzon, capturing Manila on January 2, 1942. In accordance with War Plan Orange-3 (WPO-3), the long-standing American contingency plan, USAFFE forces withdrew to the Bataan Peninsula to prolong resistance and await reinforcements that never arrived (Baclagon, 1965; Connaughton, 2001; Morton, 1953).

The defense of Bataan formally began on January 7, 1942, when General Jonathan Wainwright assumed command of the I Philippine Corps in the western sector and General George Parker assumed command of the II Philippine Corps in the eastern sector. The peninsula was split along the Mt. Natib–Mariveles line, with MacArthur maintaining overall command from Corregidor. A "defense in depth" was organized, with the main battle line stretching from Abucay on the east to Mauban on the west. Forward outposts, beach defenses, and reserve positions reinforced this line, though the forces assigned were poorly trained, under-equipped, and fatigued from weeks of retreat (Morton, 1953).

For the town of Morong, the significance of these deployments was immediate. Though Mauban was the designated western anchor, prewar reconnaissance had already flagged Morong's beaches as a potential point of Japanese envelopment. In early 1941, Colonel Hugh Casey, MacArthur's engineer officer, recommended that the line be extended northward to include Moron, warning that if left unfortified, the town's beaches could be exploited for a flanking maneuver (Morton, 1953). Ultimately, Mauban remained the anchor, but the village of Morong was partially secured by Company I of the 1st Infantry and Troop G of the 26th Cavalry, which patrolled the beaches and blocked landings.

The terrain around Morong heightened both its vulnerability and its importance. Colonel Skerry, Wainwright's engineer officer, described the western coast as "a solid mass of woods stretching east to a high mountain range," with only Morong and Bagac breaking the formidable wall of forest (Morton, 1953, p. 180). The West Road connecting Mariveles, Bagac, and Morong was only partially improved, while beyond Morong, movement depended on narrow, winding trails. Isolated and rugged, the town was nonetheless a critical outpost. Morton (1953) noted:

The Mauban line along which Wainwright's I Corps was posted extended from the slopes of Mt. Silangan on the east, westward along Mauban Ridge, to the small coastal village which gave the line its name. (Map 12) Along the steep and rugged

slopes of the mountain was Company K of the 1st Infantry (PA), which had been ordered to establish contact with II Corps on the right. It was never successful in accomplishing its mission, an impossible one in the view of many officers. To its left was a battalion of the 31st Field Artillery, 31st Division (PA), organized and equipped as infantry. The 3rd Infantry of Brig held the rest of the line—Gen Fidel V. Segundo's 1st Division (PA). About three-quarters of a mile in front of the main line of resistance, from Bayandati to a point about midway up the mountain, was the outpost line, operated by elements of the 3d Infantry. Defending Moron, two miles north of Bayandati, and the sandy stretch of beach between it and the outpost line was Company I, 1st Infantry, and Troop G, 26th Cavalry. In corps reserve was the 91st Division (PA), with combat elements of the 71st Division attached; the 26th Cavalry; and the 1st Infantry (less detachments) (p. 278).

However, veteran testimony confirms that the Japanese were familiar with Moron long before their landings. Participant I recalled that his father had once assisted Japanese traders in digging markers near the town, which were later understood as reconnaissance aids for an invasion. These memories corroborate broader claims that Japanese nationals engaged in intelligence gathering under the guise of commerce in the prewar years (Ramsey & Rivele, 1990). Such testimonies show how Morong's ordinary villagers were unwittingly drawn into the invasion's scaffolding before Pearl Harbor. Alternatively, another narrative from a local war veteran, and a lawyer, Major Jaime L. Guerrero, who has been part of the 88<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, in his book, "Waiting for the Enemy: Defending Bataan to the Limit of Endurance," states that the Philippine Scouts had been conducting reconnaissance before the war. Guerrero (2010) noted that the Philippine Scouts have been staying on their family land in Morong, where, as a kid, he experienced target shooting with floating coconuts in the river. Guerrero (2010) also noted that the horses of the Philippine Scouts have been larger than locally bred horses, and locals refer to them as "kabayong mola," a term that conveys their immense stature.

Furthermore, Guerrero (2010) described how the Philippine Scouts got along with the locals of Morong, noting that the soldiers were said to be courting local women. These differing perspective highlights how both parties of the upcoming war prepared for the long wait before the first move in the bombing of Pearl Harbor. These highlight both military strategies and social and cultural implications of the prewar activities of both Japanese and American forces.

Accordingly, archival and journalistic sources underline the vulnerability of the Filipino-American forces at the onset of war in the town of Morong. It was described by U.S. Army histories that there were firefights along the Bataan River, where Filipino units under I Corps briefly repelled Japanese patrols (Morton, 1953). Moreover, Frank Hewlett's wartime dispatches in the Honolulu Star-Bulletin similarly recorded Japanese probes along Bataan's western shoreline in January 1942, framing them as diversionary thrusts to stretch the USAFFE line. The Wainwright Papers, later compiled by Ancheta (1980), confirm that Morong's role was to delay infiltration as long as possible, effectively serving as a "sacrificial perimeter" for the greater defense of Bataan.

The social conditions of Morong further shaped the character of its defense. A small, rural community dependent on farming and fishing, it was defended by largely reservists and soldiers from other provinces, who were suddenly pressed into military duty. Oral memory recalls how farmers and fishermen transformed overnight into combatants, relying on makeshift weapons, familiarity with the terrain, and resilience. This reflects broader scholarship emphasizing that Philippine resistance relied heavily on civilian support and local geography as force multipliers (Baclagon, 1965; Kerkvliet, 2002; Agoncillo, 1990).

The situation before the Battle of Moron was thus defined by overlapping layers of global strategy, national military planning, and local civilian experience. While overshadowed in official history by larger engagements at Layac, Abucay, and Mount Samat, the fight was no less defining for the people of Morong. It was here that villagers were thrust onto the front line of World War II, their resilience pitted against overwhelming odds. The convergence of archival evidence and oral testimony ensures that Morong's folded pages remain part of the broader narrative of Bataan's defense. It is against this backdrop of vulnerability and resilience that the events of January 1942 unfolded. The following section reconstructs the Battle of Moron itself, drawing on archival accounts, military reports, and personal testimonies to show how strategy, circumstance, and community converged in one of Bataan's most overlooked wartime clashes.

### *The See-Saw Battle of Moron*

On January 10, 1942, the Japanese 122nd Infantry, under Colonel Watanabe, arrived in Olongapo and was placed under the operational control of General Masaharu Homma's 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Two days later, on January 12, Japanese forces seized Grande Island at the mouth of Subic Bay, consolidating their foothold in preparation for a western advance into Bataan (Baclagon, 1965). Reports of enemy activity quickly reached I Corps headquarters. By January 14, General Fidel Segundo, commander of the 1st Regular Division, received confirmation of enemy movements and ordered Captain Santos to establish a defensive line with Companies A and L of the 1st Infantry in the Mount Silangan area. Santos was also tasked with maintaining contact with the 51st Division to the east, underscoring the importance of linking the scattered defensive positions that stretched across Bataan's rugged terrain (Baclagon, 1965).

At dawn on January 14, Moron's defenders spotted a strong Japanese force advancing toward the town. The following morning, January 15, as the enemy prepared to cross the Batalan River, Company I of the 1st Infantry opened fire. A sharp firefight erupted along the riverbanks. Despite taking casualties, the Japanese pressed their attack under the cover of mortar fire and eventually succeeded in forcing the river. Overwhelmed by superior numbers and firepower, the Filipino outpost was forced to withdraw through the town. Lieutenant Ledda, already wounded in the encounter, managed to pull his company back while ordering Morong set ablaze, a painful but deliberate act intended to clear the defenders' field of fire and deny shelter to the enemy (Baclagon, 1965). What followed was a day-long battle that demonstrated both the defenders' resilience and the Japanese assault's ferocity. Filipino troops fought desperately from hastily prepared positions, forcing the Japanese to commit more men

and resources than anticipated. Recognizing the gravity of the situation, General Wainwright attached Troops F and G of the 26th Cavalry to the 1st Regular Division. At the same time, General Segundo prepared a counterattack using the 1st Engineer Battalion, cavalry elements, and units of the 3rd Infantry. This combined effort checked Japanese momentum and inflicted significant losses, temporarily stabilizing the line (Baclagon, 1965).

Accounts describe the Battle of Moron as fluid and brutal. After intense artillery preparation, Filipino forces launched counterattacks that devolved into hand-to-hand combat. By noon, Morong was briefly recaptured, its defenders driving the Japanese back across the river line. However, this victory proved temporary. Homma reinforced his western units with fresh troops landed north of Morong, and within twenty-four hours, the Japanese returned in greater strength. The cycle of assault and counterassault repeated: Filipino soldiers threw themselves furiously into renewed fighting, once more retaking Morong by noon on January 16. However, as Baclagon (1965) records, the victory was short-lived. By the night of January 16, successive Japanese assaults broke through exhausted defenses, forcing the battered 1st Infantry back to the Mauban Line.

Local oral memory provides an important counterpoint to the impression of retreat as defeat. Participant 4, a local historian, explained: *"Yung Morong engagement was a victory and delayed and blunted the Japanese attack—no question about it. The Philippine Army held the line after the 26th Cavalry charge. Pero hindi nila kasalanan ang sumunod na nangyari. The May Japanese force was able to get around behind them from Mt. Natib and cut off the road. Wainwright had no choice but to order their retreat. They were forced to leave behind heavy equipment and artillery and retreat on foot. Kasi may encounter a Japanese roadblock along the only road going south. Hindi nila ma-recapture."* ["The Morong engagement was a victory that delayed and blunted the Japanese attack. There is no question about it. The Philippine Army held the line after the 26th Cavalry charge. However, what happened afterward was not their fault. A Japanese force managed to get around behind them from Mt. Natib and cut off the road. Wainwright had no choice but to order their retreat. They were forced to abandon heavy equipment and artillery and withdraw on foot because the Japanese had established a roadblock along the only road going south. They could not recapture it."]. This testimony aligns with archival evidence that the Moron engagement, though overshadowed in official accounts, played a crucial role in delaying Japanese advances on the western sector of Bataan. Far from a collapse, it was a hard-fought action that forced Homma to divert reinforcements, buying valuable time for I Corps to consolidate along the Mauban Line. For the residents of Moron, the battle left an indelible mark: their town torched by its own defenders, their fields turned into trenches, and their lives upended by a global conflict that had arrived quite literally at their doorstep.

The Battle of Moron was not only a test of Filipino endurance but also a moment where the famed 26th Cavalry (Philippine Scouts) was drawn directly into the line of fire. Their commitment to reinforce the 1st Regular Division at Moron set the stage for one of the last mounted charges in modern military history. As the defenders regrouped and counterattacked in the burning town, the horse riders of the 26th prepared to ride into history, embodying both the valor and desperation that characterized Bataan's defense. The following



section examines this dramatic episode, remembered in both archival accounts and living memory as the turning point in Moron's brief but fierce stand.

### *January 16, 1942: The Last Cavalry Charge*

The events of January 16, 1942, mark a defining moment in the history of Morong. On this day, the 26th Cavalry Regiment (Philippine Scouts) executed what has been recognized as the last horse-mounted charge in the history of the United States Army (Ramsey & Rivale, 1990). According to Ramsey's memoir, *Lieutenant Ramsey's War*, the charge was both desperate and heroic. A total of 27 horse riders from 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment Troop G-F were set up as advance guards for the reconnaissance activity because of General Fidel Segundo's abandonment in securing the river lines. This line was monumental in their defensive position. Thus, the overall commander of the I Corps, General Jonathan Wainwright, was deeply moved in issuing his order to Captain John Wheeler to lead the team. They were divided into three platoons. The advance platoon was led by Lt. Ramsey, who was assigned to Troop E but was requested by General Wainwright to join the reconnaissance operation. In his affidavit, PFC Pedro Euperio stated that their platoon encountered a group of soldiers wearing Filipino military uniforms. To their surprise, they were Japanese soldiers pretending to be Filipino soldiers.

Leading his platoon into the center of Morong, Ramsey described the thunder of hooves as scouts drew their weapons and surged forward against Japanese lines that were cumulating from the northern side of the Bataan River (Ramsey & Rivale, 1990). Given their numerical disadvantage, Lt. Ramsey made the best decision: to charge the enemy with pistols and horses. The maneuver of the 27 horse riders caught the enemy by surprise, scattering their front ranks and driving others back into the river. The charge was supplemented by the security of the whole town from snipers hiding in bushes and nipa huts. The horse riders then secured the town's different areas, from the vicinity of the church to the coastlines and riverbanks. The charge allowed friendly forces valuable time to regroup and reposition. Although on a limited scale, the action embodied courage and defiance at a moment when Bataan was already under siege.

Eyewitness testimony supports this account. Residents remembered how the clash engulfed the heart of the town. One participant recalled that the fighting reached the grounds near the church and spilled across the river, forcing families to seek shelter in Ungal. The affidavits of survivors such as PFC Pedro Euperio and 2nd Lt. Eliseo Mallari confirm the impact of the mounted charge. Euperio described being severely wounded but refusing to surrender his pistol, insisting, "Sir, I am still a fighting trooper, and I do not want to give up my pistol" (Euperio, n.d., p. 3). Mallari likewise testified that Ramsey's platoon had already "completely wiped out the enemies in the center of the village and scattered the rest" before his own platoon advanced (Mallari, n.d., p. 2). Both soldiers praised the discipline and loyalty of the Filipino scouts, with Mallari emphasizing that "our strength was in loyalty" (p. 4).

The essence of the last cavalry charge was established by the inefficiency of horse use in subsequent wars. For instance, in his memoirs, Ramsey stated that, days after the last cavalry charge, the surviving horses were brought to slaughterhouses to feed soldiers,

marking the end of the mounted 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, which then transitioned into infantry. This incident was supported by a local guerrilla who reported having a chance to be fed by the meat of the horses that the local retrieved from Japanese soldiers. Participant 1 noted that this enormous horse is one of the Philippine Scouts that was left behind due to injuries. A guerrilla leader then slaughtered this horse to feed the local people.

For the people of Morong, the battle represents more than a line in military history. It is a local legacy that links community memory to the national struggle. January 16 stands as both a day of devastation and a testament to bravery. Commemorating this date could allow the community to reclaim Morong's place in the larger narrative of World War II, ensuring that future generations recognize the courage of both the Filipino scouts and the townspeople who lived through the fighting.

### ***January 17–19, 1942: Flight and Hiding in the Hills***

As Japanese pressure intensified, families made quick decisions to abandon their homes. Participant 1 recalled, "*Nasa hulo kami... Punta na sa hulo, kanya-kanyang lugar na pinuntahan, kami jan sa Ungcal nagtago*" (We were in the hideouts. Families went to their chosen hideouts. We hid in Ungcal). This was a period of mass displacement. Families fled in small groups, often carrying only rice, salt, and a few belongings. Nights were spent in makeshift shelters, with mats laid on cold ground, guarded by silence and fear. Children cried softly, and elders warned them to remain quiet because Japanese patrols might be nearby.

After the last mounted charge, the 26<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, which had successfully defended the village of Morong, returned to its camp in the Mauban line, tired from the Battle of Morong, which had lasted for days and was the first battle won by the I Corps upon its installation on the Bataan peninsula. Official reports for these dates describe Japanese infiltration tactics in I Corps sectors (Ancheta, 1980), but they omit the parallel exodus of civilians. Oral testimony fills this silence, portraying civilians' sacrifices for survival: the smell of damp forest, the fear of footsteps at night, and the hunger that deepened each day. The forest became both a sanctuary and a prison, offering concealment but also exposing families to disease, mosquitoes, and constant anxiety.

### ***January 20–21, 1942: The KM Post 167 Roadblock***

By January 20, Japanese infiltration had increased. Operational reports note that during the night of January 20, the enemy secured the Moron–Bagac road at Kilometer Post 167 (Ancheta, 1980). The 20th Infantry Japanese soldier who penetrated the eastern flank of I Corps, from the slopes of Mt. Natib, has established a roadblock at KM Post 167. The roadblock has been so effective that even General Wainwright has personally ordered it destabilized. However, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFPE) soldiers failed to destabilize the roadblock; thus, this seizure was strategically decisive. It cut communication lines and disrupted supply movements for both American and Filipino forces.

For civilians, this event meant blocked roads and the loss of safe passage to other towns, such as Bagac, Pilar, and Balanga. While Participant 1 did not describe the road specifically, his testimony highlights the lived effects. He spoke of paths that could no longer

be used, checkpoints where Japanese soldiers appeared suddenly, and the growing sense that the town was sealed off. What was a military setback in reports was, for ordinary people, a suffocating feeling of entrapment. Everyday routines, such as fetching water or moving livestock, suddenly became life-threatening risks among the townspeople.

### **January 22–23, 1942: Withdrawal to the Reserve Battle Position**

After numerous attempts to dislodge the Japanese roadblock proved unsuccessful, the USAFFE had to retreat along the shoreline and abandon all their heavy equipment and weapons. This abandonment of artillery because of the roadblock would significantly contribute to the fall of Bataan. On January 22, 1942, the USAFFE issued orders for both I and II Corps to withdraw to the Reserve Battle Position in Bataan, Bagac-Orion Line of Defense (Ancheta, 1980). This maneuver aimed to consolidate defensive lines in anticipation of continued Japanese advances from the north, as the fall of Morong on the western flank and the surrounding positions had left the Bataan Peninsula increasingly vulnerable. From various sources (Ancheta, 1980; Baclagon, 1965; Morton, 1953), this withdrawal posed significant logistical challenges: troops were fatigued from days of continuous fighting, supply lines were disrupted, and the peninsula's rugged terrain impeded their movement. The challenge is for the units to transport artillery, ammunition, and limited rations while maintaining cohesion under the constant threat of enemy reconnaissance and skirmishes in the area. In addition to these challenges are the diseases that contracted the soldiers in their camps in the heavy jungle, like beri-beri and malaria. Furthermore, disease transmission can also be attributed to their hydration from natural water sources, such as rivers and paddy fields.

At the same time, civilians experienced severe upheaval. Thousands were displaced from their homes as retreating forces to the “hulo” (upstream areas in the jungle) and Japanese patrols moved through towns and villages, creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Reports from the period note widespread food shortages, with families forced to rely on meager rations or to forage for roots and wild plants, and a scarcity of medicines, particularly quinine, which exacerbated outbreaks of malaria and dysentery among soldiers and civilians alike (Hewlett, 1942a; Dionisio, 1943). These conditions highlight the hardships of wartime: the tactical challenges faced by the military while fighting for their lives against disease, as well as the human toll on the civilian population, whose survival depended on improvisation, resilience, and local networks of support.

The convergence of military withdrawal and civilian suffering illustrates how the early days of the Bataan campaign were not only defined by combat but by the broader struggle to sustain life under extreme conditions. Oral histories from Morong residents, for example, Participant 1 describes families hiding in makeshift shelters, children weakened by illness, and adults scavenging for food, providing a vivid complement to the operational accounts found in military archives. While this period of withdrawal entails irrevocable sacrifices among the townspeople, it also sets the stage for subsequent guerrilla activities and the eventual formation of organized resistance in the Morong area.

### **January 24–25, 1942: Final Withdrawal from Morong**

As the withdrawal accelerated, USAFFE troops effectively abandoned Morong. Archival accounts indicate that the movement of I and II Corps was completed by January 25, 1942, leaving the town exposed to advancing Japanese patrols and small reconnaissance and occupation units (Ancheta, 1980). For the military, this maneuver represented a tactical repositioning, consolidating forces into the Reserve Battle Position in Bataan to better resist the Japanese advance. For the townspeople, however, the withdrawal meant the collapse of fragile security and the sudden absence of formal protection from the Japanese invaders.

While operational records largely ignore the presence of civilians, oral histories and participant testimonies illuminate the human impact. Residents faced immediate threats from Japanese patrols, with families forced to flee into the surrounding forests and hills, carrying only essential possessions. Children and the elderly suffered exposure, hunger, and the stress of hiding. At the same time, the town's infrastructure, including homes, markets, and places of worship, remained vulnerable to looting and incidental damage from skirmishes. The withdrawal marked the transition of Morong from a defended military zone to a community under occupation, where ordinary survival became a daily struggle, and civilians had to rely on improvised networks, local knowledge, and resilience to evade capture or violence. This period also set the stage for the later emergence of guerrilla resistance. The absence of organized military forces created both a power vacuum and an opportunity for local leaders and former soldiers to form networks. These networks would later form the foundation of the Moron Regiment, the local guerrilla unit, enabling inhabitants to resist occupation and maintain some degree of agency under Japanese control.

### **January 26, 1942: Completion of the Reserve Line**

By daylight on January 26, 1942, USAFFE forces had fully established themselves along the newly designated Reserve Battle Position, completing the planned withdrawal of I and II Corps (Ancheta, 1980). From a military perspective, the maneuver was considered a strategic success, allowing Filipino and American forces to consolidate their defenses, maintain cohesion, and prepare for the inevitable Japanese advance. The official reports emphasize troop movements, logistical coordination, and the delay imposed on enemy forces.

For the residents of Moron, however, the implications were far more immediate and personal. With the withdrawal of organized military protection, the town was left exposed to Japanese reconnaissance and patrols, and families were forced to confront the realities of life under occupation. Civilians faced insecurity, the risk of property confiscation, and the collapse of typical social and economic structures. Daily survival became paramount due to limited access to food, medicine, and safe shelter. Schools and local governance ceased to function normally, and townspeople had to rely on improvised strategies for concealment, self-protection, and the safeguarding of families.

January 26 thus marks a dual turning point in the history of Morong. Militarily, it concluded the town's brief role in the front-line defense of Bataan, while socially and culturally, it initiated a period of civilian vulnerability and adaptation. The withdrawal set the stage for the emergence of local resistance networks and guerrilla activity, as surviving soldiers, local leaders, and ordinary citizens clandestinely organized to oppose the

occupation. In this way, the day bridged conventional warfare and the protracted struggle of irregular resistance that would define Morong's experience throughout the Japanese occupation.

### **Late 1942–1943: Japanese Zonings, Civilian Hardships, and Local Resistance**

According to the accounts by Major Romualdo S. Linao, one of the officers of Morong, Regiment, it was by November 1942 that the Japanese puppet government took over the whole town after the fall of Bataan on April 9, 1942. Major Linao mentioned that the Japanese invaders left the town after securing it from the USAFFE, and the people of Morong returned to their homes after fleeing into the mountains. He reiterated that their hatred of the Japanese occupants is instinctive among townspeople. By September 1942, a local underground movement was already established among townspeople. The pre-war municipal mayor, Estanislao Angeles, organized local people to gather weapons and sabotage Japanese lines. When the Zambales Guerrilla Leader, Capt. Ralph McGuire sent his emissary, Lt. Haygens, who found that the group was already an organized movement. The group was then adopted on September 9, 1942, as the Moron Regiment, Western Luzon Military District, USAFFE Luzon Guerrilla Area Forces, which later attached as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of East Central Luzon Guerrilla Area (ECLGA). By September 19, 1942, more than a thousand officers and men had pledged support for the cause, leading to the promotion of Major Estanislao Angeles to the Rank of Colonel. Participant 1 noted that they created camps in Lubigan, Lusbo, Ungkal, and Tayaong to support resistance activities. Local schools, such as Morong Elementary School and Binaritan Elementary School, have also been used as camps by local guerrillas. At the same time, the Japanese invaders occupied the Municipal Hall and the neighboring structures, establishing a garrison in the middle of the village. At the same time, the century-old coral stone church of Nuestra Señora del Pilar near the Municipal Hall was burnt and damaged. These guerrilla bases relied heavily on civilian cooperation. Confirmed by the guerrilla reports, their families carried food, ammunition, and intelligence to guerrilla units despite the constant threat of Japanese reprisal.

Despite these small successes and show of resilience, the cost of resistance was severe for the townspeople. In 1943, Japanese authorities implemented zonings (Ancheta, 1980), forcibly relocating civilians of Morong, Bataan, to concentrated areas such as Ilingin, intending to sever their support for guerrilla activities. Participant 1 vividly described the brutality encountered in these zonings: civilians suspected of aiding guerrillas were subjected to systematic beatings, including targeted strikes to the biceps designed to incapacitate without immediately killing, followed by submersion in water and repeated assaults. Victims often endured multiple cycles of torture, reflecting the Japanese intent to instill terror and compliance.

Psychological terror accompanied the physical violence. Civilians were forced to kneel, stand, or endure public humiliation, while armed soldiers monitored their every movement. Participant 1 recalled that even children were exposed to this threat, compelled to remain silent and compliant to survive. The personal toll of these operations was profound. Participant 2 noted that the sustained torture led to the death of Mayor Estanislao Angeles,

underscoring the personal risk borne by local leaders. In addition, Participant 3 recounted how her father used guerrilla firearms to free relatives captured by Japanese forces, highlighting both the ingenuity and moral complexity of resistance: cooperation with guerrillas often involved confrontation, yet allowed families to protect one another under perilous circumstances.

Despite these severe measures, the bond between civilians and the Moron Regiment remained strong. Communities continued to provide shelter, supplies, and intelligence, sustaining guerrilla operations. The Japanese zonings, while intended to weaken guerrilla support, paradoxically strengthened local solidarity. Families endured forced relocation, food shortages, disease, and constant surveillance, yet maintained clandestine support for resistance fighters. The experiences of Participants 1, 2, and 3 reveal the interplay between civilian suffering and active resistance, illustrating how the Morong community collectively shaped its wartime narrative through resilience, courage, and sacrifice.

#### ***November 25–28, 1944: The Ibayo Ambush, A Local Symbol of Resistance***

Based on the accounts of Maj. Linao, one of the most celebrated actions of the Moron Regiment, occurred in Sitio Ibayo, Barangay Sabang, Morong, Bataan. On November 25, 1944, guerrilla fighters ambushed a Japanese patrol, killing twenty-three (23) enemy soldiers. This operation not only disrupted Japanese movements but also demonstrated the local capacity to resist occupation forces. Participant 1 added that the local guerrilla demonstrated unity and strategic planning in this operation, *“Ah dito lang yun, yung grupo ni Gaudencio Mangalindan na yun, nagtatrabaho sa mga Hapon sa Mabayo, ngayon, nagkaroong order ang mga Hapon siguro na mag-roving doon sa bayan, magpatrolya. Ayun natambangan sila, Diyan nga sa may Ibayo, sa may gasulinahan, yung bukid doong kapag nagbabaha ay lubog... (Ah, it was just there, that group of Gaudencio Mangalindan, the ones working for the Japanese in Mabayo. Then, the Japanese likely ordered them to perform roving duties in town, including patrols. That is when they were ambushed, right there in Ibayo, near the gasoline station, in the area of the fields that get submerged when it floods...”*

Participant 1 added that the local guerrilla who led the Japanese invaders as a fake informant would drop the bamboo pack as a signal for the ambush. One of them survived but was also apprehended and killed in the neighboring barangay (Nagbalayong), *“Yuyuko siya, bago tatahi na, bahala na yung mga hapon at gerilya. Meron pang nakatakas nanabi nabi niyang dagat. Papuntang Bagac, Ay nasabat din siya ng gerilya don, taga-Nagbalayong, napatay din siya (He deliberately let himself drop to the ground, surrendering himself to whatever might transpire between the Japanese and the guerrillas. One member of the group reportedly escaped, fleeing toward the shoreline toward Bagac. However, he was later intercepted by guerrilla forces from Nagbalayong, where he was also killed)”*.

These oral testimonies further illuminate the planning and execution of these ambushes. Participant 1 described how Japanese patrols, sometimes accompanied by civilians working for the occupiers, were guided by local collaborators such as Gaudencio Mangalindan. The ambush site near Ibayo, particularly the fields prone to flooding, was chosen for its tactical advantage, allowing guerrillas to trap and overwhelm enemy forces

while avoiding civilian casualties. Participant 1 emphasized that despite Japanese attempts at roving patrols and intimidation, the local guerrilla unit was steadfast and suffered zero casualties, “sa mga Pilipino, wala silang napatay noon”, highlighting the guerrillas’ discipline and focus on their military targets.

The bodies of 23 Japanese killed in this ambush were reportedly retrieved by their comrades; however, there is a narrative that this would not be possible because of the weakening of the invaders in their campaign in late 1944. One of the relatives of Col. Estanislao Angeles noted that the bodies of the Japanese soldiers were buried near the area of the ambush, which is now a gasoline station. Other relatives of guerrillas confirmed that there were bones found near the paddy field, but they were never recognized.

Moreover, Participant 1 added that the General Service Troops assisted the Morong Regiment led by Major Pacifico Briones in ambushing the Japanese forces in Ibayo, Sabang, Morong, Bataan. This is confirmed by the Kaki Intelligence Report No. 1 dated January 5, 1944, *“Pashiko\* (Pacifico) (9) Buriones (Briones?) and 300 men of Nueva Ecija Province Anti-Japanese National Army is believed to have entered a camp in Mabaya (Mabayo) Mountain, 7 km from Moron (Morong) on 28<sup>th</sup>. Moron’s town-head requested the constabulary and also submitted a petition to the “government” and General Francisco, asking for reinforcement and mopping-up.”*

Participant 3, reflecting on the event, emphasized the importance of civilian support. Families provided food, relayed intelligence, and sometimes risked their lives to aid guerrilla operations, knowing the consequences could be brutal, including torture or forced relocation during Japanese zonings. These accounts underscore the interplay among local knowledge, terrain, and civilian cooperation, which proved decisive to the success of the ambushes. The Ibayo Ambush illustrates the guerrillas’ tactical strengths: intimate knowledge of the local terrain, hit-and-run tactics, and effective coordination despite the threat of superior enemy forces. Strategically, the attacks compelled the Japanese to divert troops to counterinsurgency operations, thereby weakening their control over Moron and the surrounding areas. Symbolically, the Ibayo Ambush became a landmark in Moron’s collective memory, representing the courage, ingenuity, and resilience of a small town that refused to surrender under occupation. Today, the ambush stands as a testament to local heroism, worthy of commemoration in historical narratives and civic celebrations in Morong.

Furthermore, there has been a series of Moron Regiment exploits based on Major Linao’s account. Just three days later, on November 28, 1944, the Moron Regiment struck again, ambushing a Japanese truck loaded with food supplies. All seven Japanese personnel aboard were killed, and the guerrillas seized the cargo, providing much-needed material and sustaining morale among its members. Interestingly, Participant 1 narrated a miraculous instance that the Japanese attack was crossfired by the Allied Forces that would supposedly have wiped out the whole village, *“Meron pang isa. Yung jan nanggaling din sa kwan na yan, eroplano na. Eroplano, ang pinaka guide naman doon ay si Kaka Ariston Nazareno, nanggaling sa may bandang Mabayo. Yun pala, nagkaroon ng kwan ang Hapon na ang ating bayan ay masama ang record sa kanila. Kaya ang balak daw ay ririndihin tayo dito at papagpapatayin ang mga bata at matanda. Yung mga abutang buhay dito, papatayin na. Ngayon, ang nangyari, kung bakit parang nagkataon na*



*parang nagkakaabot ang komunikasyon noong nga mga gerilya at Amerikano. Ay bakit nga dumating yung mga ilang eroplano na pursuit ng mga Amerikano na tinira nga yan mga nandyan sa may Ulunin, kaya hindi nakaabot dito* (There was another incident. Someone came from that same group—this time involving an aircraft, an airplane. The guide for that operation was Ariston Nazareno, who came from the Mabayo area. It turned out that the Japanese had formed the impression that our town had a bad record with them. Their supposed plan was to bombard us here and kill both the young and the elderly; whoever they found alive, they intended to execute. What happened next seemed almost coincidental, as if the communications between the guerrillas and the Americans had aligned at just the right moment. Because several American pursuit planes arrived and attacked those Japanese positioned in the Ulunin area, they were prevented from reaching our town)’’.

Participant 1 vividly remembered hearing that “ang tubig daw ay kumukuto sa bala” (The water was said to be boiling with bullets), describing how the intense aerial firepower tore through enemy formations. The attack disrupted Japanese movements, preventing them from reaching the town and carrying out their plan of wholesale killings. This episode underscores both the fragility and resilience of Moron during the occupation. On one hand, the town lived under constant threat of annihilation; on the other, the intertwining of guerrilla activity and the return of American forces created moments of salvation. Participant 1 remarked that without the timely aerial assault, “bihira ang mga natira sa amin dito dahil wala kaming malay (Very few of us would have survived here because we were unaware of what was happening)”, suggesting that the survival of many families hinged on this fortuitous intervention. While not as strategically organized as the Ibayo Ambush, the aerial pursuit episode highlights the precariousness of civilian life during wartime. It also demonstrates how local guerrilla efforts and the broader Allied campaign intersected, shaping outcomes not just on the battlefield but in the survival of entire communities.

## **Discussion**

This study reconstructed the Battles of Moron, fought during the Japanese invasion of 1941–1942 and the pre-liberation period of 1944–1945, using both oral testimonies and archival records to create a narrative account. Beyond military operations, the study examined civilian experiences under occupation, the emergence of organized guerrilla resistance, the underrepresented narratives of their sacrifices and heroism, and the long-term social and cultural impacts of these historical narratives on Morong, Bataan. By combining Participant 1’s accounts with archival sources such as *The Wainwright’s Paper* (Ancheta, 1980), *The Fall of the Philippines* (Morton, 1953), Frank Hewlett’s dispatches in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (1942a, 1942b), historical narratives from veterans (Baclagon, 1965; Guerrero, 2010) and PVAO records of the 3rd Battalion, East Central Luzon Guerrilla Area, this study reconstructed both chronological events and the lived realities of communities under wartime conditions.

During the withdrawal of U.S. and Filipino forces in January 1942, I and II Corps moved to the Reserve Battle Position in Bataan. Operational records emphasize logistical challenges and troop movements, yet civilians were left exposed. Morong’s residents faced shortages of food and medicine, outbreaks of malaria and dysentery, and general insecurity

that led them to go to the mountain areas. Oral testimonies revealed the social and emotional toll, including improvised burials and fear for personal safety. The withdrawal concluded on January 26, signaling the end of Morong's front-line defense and the onset of civilian vulnerability.

By September 1942, local resistance was formally established under the Moron Regiment within the Western Luzon Military District, USAFFE Luzon Guerrilla Area Forces, which later attached as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the East Central Luzon Guerrilla Area (ECLGA). Col. Estanislao Angeles was appointed commander, and camps were established in defensible locations, including Lubigan, Lusbo, Ungkal, and Tayaong. Civilian participation in these camps, including the provision of food, intelligence, and shelter, was crucial to sustaining guerrilla activities despite Japanese surveillance and reprisals.

Among notable operations, the Ibayo Ambush stands out. On 25 November 1944, the Moron Regiment ambushed a Japanese patrol in Sitio Ibayo, killing twenty-three soldiers. On November 28 of the same year, a subsequent ambush of a Japanese truck carrying food supplies resulted in the deaths of all seven personnel aboard, and the cargo was captured. Oral testimonies described local guides, civilian support, and careful planning that minimized civilian casualties. Beyond these ground operations, Morong faced the looming threat of mass reprisals. Participant 1 recalled that Japanese forces planned to punish the civilian population with executions, stating in translation, "They were going to shoot us here and kill the children and adults. Those who survived would also be killed." This plan was disrupted when American pursuit planes intercepted the Japanese near Ulunin, preventing the intended massacre and saving many lives.

The cost of resistance was high while the Japanese government insisted on compliance by force. In 1943, the Japanese implemented zonings, forcibly relocating civilians to concentrated areas such as Ilingin to sever support for guerrilla activities. Participant 1 also described forced labor, surveillance, and torture, including water torture. Participant 3 recounted the punishment, where individuals were beaten until they collapsed and repeatedly revived in water to continue suffering. Families of Col. Estanislao Angeles recalled that torture led to the mayor's death. Participant 3 confirmed that her father intervened using guerrilla weapons to save relatives, illustrating civilian bravery and sacrifice. Despite such repression, civilians continued to supply intelligence, aid, and shelter, reinforcing the bonds between the community and guerrilla fighters. These primary data from oral histories provided vivid accounts of daily life under occupation, revealing social networks, strategies of survival, and community resilience. These accounts complement archival records by documenting experiences such as clandestine burials, local leadership in guerrilla operations, civilian involvement in tactical maneuvers, and the local population's shared goal of securing freedom from Japanese invaders. The testimonies highlight both the fragility and resilience of Morong during the occupation, showing how local guerrilla efforts and broader Allied operations intersected to shape outcomes.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### ***Conclusions***

The study concludes that the Battles of Moron retain enduring significance in the military, cultural, and social history of Bataan and the Philippines. From a military perspective, Moron's geography, particularly the control of coastal approaches and the Moron-Bagac road, shaped the broader campaign on the Bataan Peninsula. Guerrilla operations disrupted Japanese logistics and forced the diversion of enemy resources. From a cultural perspective, oral testimonies show how war transformed ordinary practices, such as burial, caregiving, and daily survival, into acts of resilience. From a social perspective, zoning and forced relocation illustrate how civilians reorganized society under occupation, balancing strategies of resistance, collaboration, and endurance.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning the study further clarify its findings. Collective memory theory explains why Morong's wartime experiences persist in local memory despite marginalization in the national historical narratives. Narrative inquiry, as a method, emphasizes how oral testimonies structure events to convey meaning and integrate military and civilian experiences. Culturally responsive pedagogy underlines the importance of using local narratives in education to connect learners with their heritage. These frameworks, in relation to historical SOPs, support the study's methodology of triangulating oral testimony, archival records, and contemporary reports to reconstruct a day-by-day account that is both accurate and reflective of lived experiences.

### ***Recommendations***

Several recommendations emerge from these conclusions. Future researchers should expand oral history collection to more families and descendants in Morong and neighboring towns, and incorporate Japanese operational diaries, U.S. Navy action reports, and additional guerrilla records to clarify contested events.

For the community, heritage markers, memorials, or a museum should be established to honor soldiers and civilians, and should include oral histories, photographs, and maps. Educationally, the reconstructed narrative should be incorporated into senior high school curricula with culturally responsive pedagogy and linguistic authenticity. Commemorative programs should be encouraged to ensure Morong's story is integrated into public memory.

In conclusion, the Battles of Moron, the occupation, and guerrilla campaigns reveal a narrative of strategic importance, human endurance, and cultural resilience. By integrating oral testimony and archival evidence, this study preserves the voices of Morong's people, contextualizes military and civilian experiences, and provides a resource for scholarship, education, and heritage. Remembering Moron (now back to its founding name, Morong) during the Japanese invasion affirms the courage, resilience, and solidarity of its people, ensuring that its significance endures for future generations.

## **References**

- Agoncillo, T. A. (1990). *History of the Filipino People*. Garotech Publishing.
- Ancheta, A. (1980). *The Wainwright Papers: A Filipino perspective on the Bataan campaign*. University of the Philippines Press.
- Ancheta, A. (1980). *The Wainwright Papers: A Filipino perspective on the Bataan campaign*. University of the Philippines Press.
- Ancheta, C. A. (1977). *Triumph in the Philippines, 1941-1946: the saga of Bataan and Corregidor*. (No Title).
- Archivo General de Indias. (1715). *Mapa de la Bahía de Manila y ensenada de Subic* [Map]. Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain. <https://pares.culturaydeporte.gob.es>
- Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). (n.d.). *History of the Armed Forces of the Philippines*. Armed Forces of the Philippines. <https://www.afp.mil.ph>
- Baclagon, U. S. (1965). *They Served with Honor: Filipino War Heroes of World War II*. Dm Press.
- Bascara, C. (2010). *A history of Bataan (1587–1900): Scanning its geographic, social, political, and economic terrain*. Bataan Peninsula State University Press.
- Bascara, C. (2019). *A History of Bataan*. Bataan Historical Society.
- Connaughton, R. M. (2001). *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines*. New York: Overlook Press.
- Decker, M. (2008). *From Bataan to Safety: The Rescue of 104 American Soldiers in the Philippines*. McFarland.
- Dionisio, F. (1943). *Diary of a resistance fighter: Notes from the Bataan front*. Philippine National Archives.
- Dioso, M. (2010). *The Times when Men Must Die: The Story of the Destruction of the Philippine Army during the Early Months of World War II in the Pacific, December 1941-May 1942*. Dorrance Publishing.
- Gainza, F. (1848). *Ensayo Físico, Descriptivo Estadístico y Religioso de la Provincia de Bataan*. Imprenta del Colegio de Sto. Tomás. Manila.
- Guerrero, J. L. (2010). *Waiting for the enemy: Defending Bataan to the limit of endurance*. New Day Publishers.
- Hewlett, F. (1942a, January 15). *Japanese forces advance into Bataan*. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, p. 3.
- Hewlett, F. (1942b, January 22). *Civilians suffer under Japanese occupation*. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, p. 5.
- José, R. T. (1992). *The Philippine Army, 1935–1942*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- José, R. T. (2012). War and Violence, History and Memory: The Philippine Experience of the Second World War. *Contestations of Memory in Southeast Asia*, 185-200.
- Kawashima, M. (1996). *The Records of the Former Japanese Army Concerning the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines*. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 27(01), 124–131. doi:10.1017/s0022463400010729
- Matthiessen, S. (2016). "4 The Occupation of the Philippines". In *Japanese Pan-Asianism and the Philippines from the Late 19th Century to the End of World War ii*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Molina, A. (1961). *The Philippine History*. Manila: National Bookstore.

- Morton, L. (1953). *The Fall of the Philippines*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, U.S. Army.
- Nakano, S. (1999). In the Language of the Occupier: Recent Work on the Japanese Period in the Philippines.
- Ramsey, E. P., & Rivele, R. (1990). *Lieutenant Ramsey's War: From Horse Soldier to Guerrilla Commander*. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's.
- Roosevelt, F. D. (1941, July 26). *Executive Order No. 8684: Calling into the service of the armed forces of the United States certain military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines*. U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Rottman, G. L. (2011). *World War II US Cavalry Units: Pacific Theater* (Vol. 175). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Zaide, G. F., & Zaide, S. M. (1999). *Philippine History and Government*. All-Nations Publishing.